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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR PM, SA/PAB, EUR/RPM, EUR/ERA AND EUR/AGS

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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: AUSTRIA SENDING UP TO 100 SOLDIERS FOR SEPTEMBER ELECTIONS

REFS: A) VIENNA 1152

B)VIENNA AU 081201Z APR 05

This message is sensitive but unclassified.

1. (SBU) On June 7, the Austrian Council of Ministers (cabinet) unanimously approved the deployment of up to 100 Austrian soldiers to Afghanistan in August - October 2005. Parliament's standing committee will have to give final approval to the deployment mandate, possibly as early as June 10. Speaking on Austrian television June 7, Defense Minister Platter said that the decision came in response to a request by UN secretary general Kofi Annan. Austria wants to contribute to building a stable and secure environment prior to and during the September elections in Afghanistan, Chancellor Schuessel explained. According to Platter, the Austrian mandate will run to the end of October 2005. Platter earlier told Embassy's Defense Attache that the Austrian soldiers would deploy as part of the security element for the German PRT in Konduz.

2. (SBU) Austria had previously deployed about 70 troops within the German ISAF contingent in Kabul from February to December 2002, and a five-man National Intelligence Cell from January to August 2003. Since 2004, a handful of Austrian staff officers have served at ISAF headquarters and at UNAMA.

3. (SBU) In March 2005, German Defense Minister Struck asked Platter to consider Austrian participation in a German-led PRT in Afghanistan. The decision to redeploy has not been especially controversial. Only Freedom Party chairman Heinz-Christian Strache has vocally opposed the move, arguing that it was too dangerous to send Austrian soldiers to this region.

Brown